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STATEMENTS TO WORKING GROUPS ON INDIGENOUS PEOPLES AND ON SLAVERY AND COLONIALISM OF THE SUBCOMMISSION ON HUMAN RIGHTS OF THE UNITED NATIONS

GENEVA

JULY 30-AUGUST 4, 1984

by SUE RABBITT ROFF for MINORITY RIGHTS GROUP

Mr. Chairman, Distinguished Delegates,

Thank you forthe opportunity to express concern that Minority Rights Group has about two issues that fall within the mandate of this Working Group.

Minority Rights Group has the privilege of consultative status with the Economic and Social Council of the United Nations. We take as our mandate the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. We are particularly concerned to work against the oppression or victimization of people because of their group characteristics - physical or social or philosophical. Minority Rights Group consistently works to affirm the inalienable rights summarized in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, especially those stated in Article 2:

> "Everyone is entitled to all the rights and freedoms set forth in this Declaration, without distinction of any kind, such as race, colour, sex, language, religion, political or other opinions, national or social origin, property, birth or other social status. Furthermore, no distinction shall be made on the basis of the political, jurisdictional, or international status of the country or territory to which a person belongs, whether it be independent, trust, non-self-governing or under any other limitation of sovereignty."

Mr. Chairman, Distinguished Delegates,

The particular concerns that Minority Rights Group brings to you today concern the peoples of small island territories - people who have effectively lost their sovereignty to colonial and neo-colonial powers and who now live in conditions which amount to <u>apartheid</u> and slavery.

The Strategic Trust Territory of the Pacific Islands was the only strategic trust created; it is the last trust to be terminated. It would be reasonable to expect that this special and last case of formal decolonization of the trust territories of the United Nations would benefit from all the practice and precedent of international law in the past forty years. Instead, the people of Micronesia are being offered a future political status which in fact amounts to annexation by the Administering Authority, the United States.

Having fragmented the trust terrtory into four micro- states the United States is offering the people of the islands second-class citizenship in artificial entities that have as little legal substance in international law as the so-called "autonomous homelands" of South Africa. The movements of the Micronesians within and between their islands is closely restricted by the Administering Authority which uses much of the meagre land of the territory as military bases or test sites for nuclear weapons. Micronesians are banned from the former for security reasons and from the latter for health reasons, since the weapons testing program of the Administering Authority has rendered some of the atolls of Micronesia radioactive and uninhabitable. At Kwajalein and Ebeye evidence of apartheid is most apparent since Micronesians are not employed on the military base, and are prevented from setting foot on it, being restricted to the smaller atoll which is heavily overpopulated and has the appearance of a South African shanty town. There are two health systems, two education systems, two rates of pay for Americans and Micronesians. Having administered Micronesia as a vast "reservation" for the last forty years, the United States is now preparing to offer a spurious process of self-determination to the people of Micronesia in which they will opt for annexation dressed up as "free association".

In the last few months Minority Rights Group has made statements in the Trusteeship Council and the Decolonization Committee expressing its severe reservations about the purported plebiscites and referenda that have been conducted in Micronesia where the people are required to simultaneously alienate large tracts of their land in return for a nuclear defence system that will make them clear targets in any confrontation entered into by the United States. We have been particularly concerned at the situation in Palau, where the people's desire for a 'nuclear-free' constitution has been reaffirmed four times and yet the United States still refuses to honor the clear wish of the people not to have nuclear weapons traverse or stored on their territory. We have expressed concern that the financial arrangements being offered the people of Micronesia are insufficient even to maintain the poor level of economic and social well being that is prevalent throughout the territory after forty years of rule by the wealthiest nation on earth. We have also expressed our anxiety that the short terms of those financial arrangements are specifically designed to hasten the process of depopulation of the islands so that the United

States can more freely use them as strategic sites. The processes of apartheid that have been established in the islands will only intensify if the so-called "Compact of Free Association" is accepted by the United Nations, because the territory will then be withdrawn effectively from international scrutiny and the Micronesians - who will have abdicated their sovereignty in the moment of accepting the Compact of Free Association - will have little recourse in international law against the 'internal' policies of the United Seates on its military bases which it administers under the sweeping powers of eminent domain.

Mr. Chairman, Distinguished Delegates,
We ask you to lend your forces to the resistance againstthe imposition of the Compact of Free Association - a mutant form of apartheid - upon the peoples of Micronesia. We fear that if this process is not resisted, the people of Micronesia will be forcibly relocated from their islands by the end of this century, and will find themselves in the same parlous situation as the Ilois Community of the Chagos Archipelago, forcibly evicted from their island homes by the British Government for the convenience of American military needs and now living in poverty in Mauritius. One of my colleagues from Minority Rights Group will explain their situation more fully in a separate submission.

Mr. Chairman, Distinguished Delegates,

It is very difficultfor a community of islanders in the middle of a vast ocea n, far from t he centres of international political and legal power, to hold out against the intense pressures such as have been brought to bear by Britain on the Ilois and the United States on the Micronesians It is all the harder when such communities look at the tragic price of resistance t o neo-colonialism paid by the East Timorese. Still fighting effectively enough after nine years of Indonesian militaryoccupation to force the Indonesians to keep the territory blockaded from int ernational inspection, tourism and trade, the people of Ea st Timor have seen a generation of their y oung men and women decimatedd by the genocidal practices of the Indonesians . The death tall has been compounded by the starvation of the people in the Indonesian attempt to force them into submission, a processhastened by drought. A world that once scoffed at the suggestion that 100,000 Timorese died between 1976 and 1980 now considers that figure to be probably conservative. We do not know for sure because the Indonesian occupiers will not permit independent obse rvers to enter the territory . Diplomats of collaborating countries are occasionally t aken on guided tours - with, however, their eyes effectively blindfolded as one Australian cartoon recently comment ed on the latest visit by an Australian diplomat.

The Indones ian military leadership has proved something that the late General Ali Moertopo a rgued in 1974 in urging the military invasion of Ea st Timor after his experience in West Irian and Gestapu: it is possible to commit genocide over a period of years and get away with it in the halls of international law so long as your diplomats repeat the same lies often enough, long enough. Indonesian diplomats have brazened out the situat ion in East Timor for ten years; they have been assisted in this process by the oddest of bedfellows, those Australian diplomats who acknowledge themselves to be part of the 'Indonesialobby' in the Australian Department of Foreign Affairs (where the Indonesia desk sports an Indonesian coat of arms) and by the coterie of Australian scholars of Indonesia who either out of an amoral convictien in the efficacy of 'pragmatism' or to protect their visa rights into Indonesia have argued for Australian appeasement of the Indonesian expansionist urge which is now being felt in Papua New Guinea too. It is very difficult to see honesty in men who accept genocide as a necessary political practice. There will be little sa tisfactien in saying "I told you so" in ten years time when the little pieces of paperen which agreements with Jakarta are written are shot through with holes. There will be little satisfaction in documenting "le t ra hison des clercs Australiennes" from a distance.

Why did Indonesia invade East Timor? Why does Australia - or her e conomists at least - accept this annexation? There are strong prospects of major oil and natural gas finds in the territorial w aters of East Timor. Indonesiaand Australia have been negotiating all these years while Indonesia has occupied East Timor for the sharing of the richesof those res ources. The most recent round of negotiations took place last month in Jakarta whither the Australian Foreign Minister scurried directly from the Australian Labor Party conference to deliver the soft ened party policy on Ea st Timor demanded by the Indonesians as a quid pro quo for even resuming the seabed talks.

Mr. Chairman, Distinguished Delegates,

Those t alks about the so-ca lled 'Timor Gap' are totally illegal. Neither Indonesia nor Australia own the seabed of East Timor. In international law Portugal is the administering power of East Timor; FRETILIN ha s beengranted petitioning status at the United Nations in recognition of its strong claim to be the successor government after a legitimate a ct of self-de termination has taken place - and no Australian government official, not even the former Prime Minister Gough Whitlam who initiated the policy of appeasement, has ever gone so far as to claim that a legitimate act of self-determination has taken place in East Timor since the Indonesian invasion. It is a great tragedy to see the heirs of Australia's only statesman, Herbert Vere Evatt, first President of the General Assemblyand staunch defender of the rights of small nations, engage Australia for probably the first time in her history in a directly illegal negotiation, placing her along wit h countries like South Africa and Indonesia outside the pale of internat ional respe ct.

Mr. Chairma n, Distinguished Delega tes,

For nine ya rs the Timorese have fought Indonesian occupation; for longer than nine y ears they have pleaded for international support for their right to self-determinatien. The United Nations has failed the East Timore se. The regional neighbours of this island have failed to concer t to bring pea ce and stability in their region. The nations of West ern Europe, shocke d by genocide in East Timor, have yet hesitated for a decad e to jeopardize their meagre trading links with Indonesia to by coming forth with constructive proposals for resolution of the conflict. Portugal st ands alone as a party directly involved in the conflict in seeking its resolution. The nation states have failed the people of East Timor. We urge this Working Group to raise as a matter of the first priority within the United Nations a proposal for a roundtable conference betwwen all the immedia tely interested parties and te refuse te bullied

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With Compliments